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ABSTRACT

The career expectations of 200 randomly selected preservice teachers (143 females and 57 males) were examined to determine differences associated with gender, socioeconomic status (SES), and academic achievement (as indicated by grade point average). The study was conducted at the University of Central Florida (Orlando) from 1986 to 1987. Subjects were juniors and seniors randomly selected from 1,200 undergraduates enrolled in the College of Education. Data were collected via administration of a questionnaire. SES classification was determined using the educational levels of the students' parents. Expectations were different for females and males and for students of different SES levels. While grade point average was not significantly different for any of these groups, university degree expectations were different for females and males and for SES groups. Implications for encouraging student teachers to pursue careers in elementary and secondary education are discussed. Three data tables are included. (TJH)

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' CAREER EXPECTATIONS BY GENDER, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

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Preservice Teachers' Career Expectations by Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Academic Achievement Levels

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ABSTRACT. The career expectations of 200 randomly selected preservice teachers were examined by gender, socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement levels (GPA). Expectations were different for females and males and for students of differing SES levels. While GPA was not different for any of these groups, university degree expectations were different for females and males and for SES groups.

Recruitment and retention of qualified, skillful teachers remain problematic, particularly in geographic areas experiencing rapid expansion. In 1985, Central Florida schools lost 10 percent of their classroom teachers, though no staff reductions were made (State of Florida, Department of Education, 1986). At this rate school administrators can expect a 50 percent teacher turnover every five years. The problem of teacher attrition is not unique to Florida. Previous research into retention rates for teachers throughout the U.S. suggests that between one-quarter and one-third of all teachers will eventually leave teaching (Charters, 1970; Mark & Anderson, 1978; Chapman & Hutcheson, 1982). One study predicts that up to one-half of all teachers will leave the field within ten years (Schlechty & Vance, 1981).

In addition to research on the numbers of teachers leaving the profession, many have studied the characteristics of those who remain in the classroom. One alarming finding is that those who have elected to remain in the teaching field are, for the most part, less academically proficient than those who leave (Schlechty & Vance, 1981; Weaver, 1979). Other studies (Dobson & Swafford, 1980; Dubey et al, 1979; Onyabe, 1977) underscore the differential relationships between socioeconomic status and educational attainment and whether a teacher chooses to remain in the classroom.

Perhaps studying the characteristics of teachers who leave or remain in the classroom provides information on only a part of the

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problem. It might be that the career aspirations and expectations of preservice teachers are related to the teacher recruitment and retention problems. Rubin and Zavalloni's landmark study (1969) on the aspirations of Trinidad youth, which explored the effects of class, race, and gender suggests that male and female students from the same socioeconomic background may have quite dissimilar expectations. This awareness that particular levels of socioeconomic status may produce varying outcomes when mediated by gender is also discussed in Sewell and Shah's study (1977) of socioeconomic status, intelligence, and educational attainment among American youth in Wisconsin.

Factors such as socioeconomic levels, achievement levels, and gender may be associated with preservice teachers' career expectations as well. The purpose of this study was to examine preservice teachers' differing career expectations and to determine whether gender, socioeconomic status, and scholastic achievement were mediating factors in their reported expectations.

Methodology

The study was conducted at the University of Central Florida, Orlando (UCF) from 1986 to 1987. The University is a relatively new institution, established in 1963. It serves a regional population and has approximately 16,500 students.

Two hundred juniors and seniors were randomly selected to participate in the study from approximately 1,200 undergraduates enrolled in UCF's College of Education. The 200 education majors included 143 female and 57 male students.

A questionnaire was developed to inquire about preservice teachers' career expectations, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, and current grade point average (GPA). The career expectations reported were analyzed using SES, gender, and GPA to determine whether patterns in career expectations were obvious when summarized using these biographical factors.

While gender and grade point average were easy to classify, a scale needed to be constructed for socioeconomic status. It was developed using the educational level of both the father and mother of the student. A four point scale was used with 4 = university graduate, 3 = attended post-secondary or community college, 2 = attended secondary or vocational school, and 1 = attended elementary school. Students were asked to indicate the education levels of both parents, and these values were summed. The sample was then divided into three groups: 7-8 points = high SES; 5-6 points = middle SES; and 2-4 points = low SES.

Simple percentages were used to summarize and analyze the data. First, the career aspirations of the total group were summarized. Second, each aspiration was summarized for females and males. Third, each aspiration was summarized by SES, and fourth, each was summarized by gender within SES. Finally, each aspiration was analyzed by GPA and anticipated university degree within gender.

Results

Expected Longevity Within Education Careers

To ascertain job aspirations and possible serialization of career expectations, students were asked what career they expected to obtain shortly after completing their studies and what was the most important career they expected to secure during their lifetime. The career expectation data in Table 1 reveals several patterns. First, 96 percent of the students expected to enter the field of education (in either an instructional or non-instructional position) shortly after completing their university studies. A second feature observable in the sample was that 81 percent of the students intended to remain within the field of education, in any capacity, throughout their lifetime.

Even more interesting was the fact that less than half of all education majors expecting to begin their careers as K-12 teachers expected to remain within the profession. For example, 94 percent expected to begin their careers as K-12 teachers, but only 39 percent expected to remain. Even when the teaching category was expanded to include university lecturer, similar anticipated attrition patterns were noted. Ninety-five percent of the education majors expected to begin K-University teaching, including community colleges, but only 55 percent expected to remain.

The Effects of Gender on Students' Career Expectations

The preponderance of females in the random sampling of UCF education majors (72 percent) reflects both the gender-differentiated university enrollment and school personnel patterns found in Florida and across the United States. For example, while half of all students enrolled in any capacity at UCF were female, 80 percent of all education majors were female. The proportion of male and female U.S. elementary school teachers reflects a similar pattern of gender differentiation. Female teachers outnumber male teachers by a ratio of

Table 1 Percentage of UCF Education Majors Reporting Given Career Expectations

Expectations	Total Group	Gender		SES		
		Female	Male	High	Mid	Low
n	200	143	57	64	73	63
Initial Career in Education	96	96	96	97	95	97
Lifetime Career in Education	81	80	82	80	77	86
Initial K-12 Teaching	94	94	95	95	92	95
Lifetime K-12 Teaching	39	45	25	34	36	48
Initial K-U Teaching	95	95	95	95	93	97
Lifetime K-U Teaching	55	57	47	55	49	60
Lifetime University Teaching	16	13	23	20	14	13

about 5:1 (Lipman-Bluman, 1984).

When students' career expectations were analyzed by gender (see Table 1), different patterns emerged for females and males. Relatively equal numbers of male and female education majors expected to begin and remain in education careers (96 percent planned to begin and 80 to 82 percent expected to remain in education). While 94 percent of the female students and 95 percent of the male students expected to begin their careers as K-12 teachers, more females (45 percent) than males (25 percent) expected to remain K-12 teachers. It also appears that more male (23 percent) than female (13 percent) education majors at UCF plan to leave K-12 for university teaching. Thus, while there was no gender differentiation with regard to entry level teaching expectations, later in life far more male than female education majors plan to abandon teaching altogether or advance to a university teaching position.

The Effects of SES and Gender on Education Majors' Career Expectations

The students reflected a broad cross-section of the local population. Using parents' level of education as indicators of relative SES, the sample was evenly distributed among high, middle and low SES groups, with each SES level representing about one-third of the student sample (see Table 1). It was also noted that this cross-sectional nature of the UCF sample was maintained when the data were divided according to gender.

Regardless of SES, 92 to 95 percent of male and female education majors at UCF planned to begin their careers as K-12 teachers (see Table 1). However, their commitment to remain K-12 teachers appeared related to SES, particularly with respect to female students (see Table 2). For example 38 percent of the female students from high SES families and 59 percent from low SES families expected to remain K-12 teachers throughout their professional careers. However, just the opposite pattern occurs with regard to university teaching. Four times as many female students from high SES families as from low SES families expected to obtain university teaching positions later in life.

This strong association between female students' SES and career expectations is not as evident within the sample of UCF male education majors, though more low SES than high SES males expected to persist at all levels of teaching. This is especially true with regard to expected university teaching careers. For male students from high SES families, 18 percent expected to obtain a university teaching position later in life, while 27 percent of those coming from low SES families had similar expectations.

Academic Achievement and Career Expectations

Two indicators of academic achievement were used. One, self-reported grade point average (GPA), was used to indicate students' current level of school achievement, and the other, terminal degree aspiration, was used as a measure of their future achievement expectations. Each indicator is summarized in Table 3 according to career aspiration (remain in K-12 teaching, leave K-12 teaching, and remain in university teaching) and gender.

While the data suggest that those students who plan to leave K-12 teaching have slightly higher self-reported GPAs (3.04) than those who plan to remain (2.98), the difference is minimal. This pattern remained constant when the data were examined by gender. It was interesting to note that students aspiring to university level teaching careers had a

Table 2 Percentage of UCF Education Majors Reporting Given Career Expectations by Gender and SES

Gender:	Female			Male		
SES:	High	Mid	Low	High	Mid	Low
Expectations n	47	55	41	17	18	22
Initial Career in Education	96	95	98	100	94	95
Lifetime Career in Education	79	78	83	82	72	91
Initial K-12 Teaching	94	93	95	100	89	95
Lifetime K-12 Teaching	38	40	59	24	22	27
Initial K-U Teaching	94	95	98	100	89	95
Lifetime K-U Teaching	60	51	63	41	44	55
Lifetime University Teaching	21	11	5	18	22	27

lower reported average GPA than did students who aspired to K-12 teaching.

Examining students' degree expectations (Table 3), several trends became apparent. First, regardless of career expectation, more males than females anticipated obtaining only a bachelor's degree. Related to the master's degree, approximately two-thirds of each of the three groups thought it would be their terminal degree. Unlike the bachelor's degree group, however, fewer males than females in each group aspired to obtaining a master's degree. Finally, of those students who planned to remain K-12 teachers, only 13 percent aspired toward the doctorate, while 30 percent of the students who planned to leave K-12 teaching and 39 percent of the students who planned university careers had doctoral degree aspirations. Although these patterns are not surprising, it is interesting to note that males and females in the remain in K-12 teaching group had very similar doctoral aspirations, and those in the other two groups did not. In these groups, many more

Table 3 Student Expectations by GPA and Degree Level

Expectation:	Remain K-12			Leave K-12			Remain Univ.		
Gender:	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M
N	78	64	14	82	55	27	31	18	13
Avg. GPA	2.98	2.98	3.00	3.04	3.05	3.02	2.84	2.85	2.83
Percentage by Degree									
Bachelor's	21	19	29	9	5	15			
Master's	67	69	57	61	69	44	61	72	46
Doctorate	13	13	14	30	25	41	39	28	54

males than females planned doctoral degrees even though their current GPAs were basically the same.

Discussion

Based on the career aspirations of this random sample of UCF undergraduate education majors, it appears that Central Florida schools can anticipate future K-12 teacher attrition rates similar to those experienced in 1985 and those projected for a five-year period. While 94 percent of these 200 future teachers plan to enter K-12 teaching, which is good news for recruiters, less than half (39 percent) plan long-range careers as K-12 teachers, which is bad news for recruiters. This figure is even greater than the 50 percent attrition rate predicted by Schlechty and Vance (1981), although their prediction is very close to the number of students (55 percent) in this study who aspire to lifetime teaching careers from kindergarten through university levels.

While some believe that K-12 teacher retention problems are related to current conditions in the schools and classrooms, this study illustrates that the problem is more complex. Preservice teachers have yet to experience school conditions, and they plan to leave K-12 teaching even before entering the profession.

An important positive finding of the study is that 81 percent of the preservice teachers at UCF plan careers in the field of education. This encouraging percentage held for both females and males, and for all three SES groups. This implies that, while only 39 percent plan to remain in K-12 teaching, another 42 percent aspire to other roles within

the field of education. Perhaps the plans of preservice teachers reflect their awareness that certification in teaching and classroom teaching experience are important prerequisites for most non-teaching professional positions in Florida school districts, as well as for teaching positions in Florida State colleges of education. Of the 42 percent who aspire to education-related roles other than K-12 teaching, 16 percent look forward to college teaching careers while 26 percent aspire to non-teaching positions, possibly in school districts. Viewing the data in this way, the largest group, 39 percent, aspires to K-12 classroom teaching; the second largest group, 26 percent, aspires to non-teaching professional education positions; the next smaller group, 19 percent, desires careers outside the field of education, and the smallest group, 16 percent, aspires to college teaching careers.

Another positive finding of the study is that those students who plan to remain K-12 teachers have self-reported achievement levels (average GPA) comparable to those who plan to seek other education positions or to leave education altogether. While antithetical to the results of the Schlechty and Vance (1981) and the Weaver (1979) studies on achievement differences for classroom teachers, this study of UCF teacher candidates illustrates that at the beginning career point, those who aspire to K-12 teaching positions are academically comparable to those who do not.

Finally,this study supports the findings of Rubin and Zavalloni (1969) and Sewell and Shah (1977). The career expectations of teacher candidates appears to be related to gender and socioeconomic status. A higher percentage of females (45 percent) than males (25 percent) aspire to lifetime careers as K-12 teachers, and a higher percentage of lower SES candidates (48 percent) than middle SES or high SES (36 and 34 percent respectively) aspire to lifetime careers in K-12 teaching. The exact opposite occurs for university teaching career aspirations. More males (23 percent) than females (13 percent) and more high SES students (20 percent) than lower SES students (13 percent) aspire to university teaching careers. It may be that there is a perceived career-prestige pecking order in education running from K-12, or entry-level positions, at one end to school district administration or university teaching positions at the other. Could it be that only very brave women and lower SES students dare, at the outset of their careers, to aspire to careers they perceive as requiring more rigor and thus being on a higher level?

The implications of such an interpretation are very interesting. While it would be socially sound to counsel promising young women and low SES students to "raise their aspirations" to match those of promising young men and high SES students, what are the implications of such

actions for K-12 teaching? Many astute educators view K-12 teaching careers as the most admirable in the field of education. Thus, perhaps promising young males and high SES students should be counseled in the virtues of K-12 teaching! This dilemma will provide educators with challenges for years to come, with no relief in sight for K-12 teacher recruiters.

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